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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

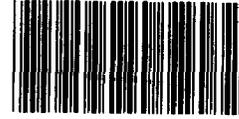
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GENERAL GOVERNMENT
DIVISION

B-210711

FEBRUARY 11, 1983

The Honorable Orrin G. Hatch
United States Senate



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Dear Senator Hatch:

Subject: Labor-Management Unrest at the Salt Lake City
Post Office (GAO/GGD-83-41)

In response to your October 1982 request, we have reviewed the labor-management relations problems at the Salt Lake City, Utah, Post Office. Our work concentrated on (1) problems that may have been created with the implementation of Regional Instruction 399 which is aimed at designating mail processing work for clerk and mail handler craft employees who are members of separate unions and (2) the timeliness of the grievance-arbitration process to resolve labor-management problems.

In performing our review we interviewed the Postmaster and several other Salt Lake City Postal Service officials as well as Service officials at the Western Slopes District Office in Utah, the Western Regional Office in California, and the Headquarters Office in Washington, D.C. We also interviewed representatives of Mail Handlers Local 332 of the National Post Office Mail Handlers, Watchmen, Messengers and Group Leader Division of the Laborers' International Union of North America, AFL-CIO. In addition, we gathered and analyzed information on the implementation of Regional Instruction 399 and the grievance-arbitration process.

The situation in Salt Lake City can best be described as a difference of opinion between the union representing the mail handlers and management regarding the number of mail handlers needed and the assignment of work to them. Both parties have been inflexible regarding their respective positions.

From the perspective of Mail Handlers Local 332, the Service is unconcerned about complaints about Regional Instruction 399 designations of craft work assignments. This has prompted many grievances and seems to have prevented the simple resolution of other unrelated grievances because of the adversary relationship that has been created.

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From management's perspective, Local 332 representatives have consistently filed grievances on matters relating to craft employees' work assignments when the Service clearly has the prerogative to manage in a manner it believes is most efficient and effective.

The dispute between mail handlers and Salt Lake City postal management dates back to March 1979 when Regional Instruction 399 was implemented at the Salt Lake City Post Office. The instruction was used by Mail Handlers Local 332 to show that clerks were filling positions at the Salt Lake City facility that should have been filled by mail handlers. It also provided Local 332 with specific criteria to identify each incident where clerks were used to perform mail handlers work even if it was for a short period of time.

It appears that management at the Salt Lake City Post Office has properly implemented Regional Instruction 399 by reassigning craft employees who were inappropriately assigned. Local 332 finds it difficult to understand, however, why the staffing level of mail handlers has remained fairly constant at 101 employees when the Service determined that 19 clerk positions should have been filled by mail handlers. Management told us that the workload at the Salt Lake City facility only supports 101 full-time mail handlers, yet it recognizes that clerks are often used to perform mail handler work.

Crossing craft lines is permissible under both the National Agreements (the contracts between the unions and the Service) and Regional Instruction 399, but Mailhandlers Local 332 claims that such activities at the Salt Lake City facility are too frequent to be permissible under the National Agreement.

On two occasions Local 332 has requested permission to do its own staffing study but its requests have been denied by local management. Management's attitude has been that union complaints about inappropriate staffing should be resolved through the grievance-arbitration process.

The number of grievances filed by members of the Mail Handlers Local 332 has increased substantially--from 90 in 1981 to 235 in the first 10 months of 1982.

We analyzed 181 grievances filed by members of Local 332 from May to October 1982 and found that 160 have been denied at the supervisory level. It is too early to tell how these grievances eventually will be resolved, but both Local 332 and management officials agree that it will take a long time to follow the process through arbitration. As of October 25, 1982, Postal Service records show that only 1 of the 15 grievances filed in May had been resolved.

We categorized the 181 grievances to better understand the problems at the Salt Lake City facility. The following table shows the number of grievances by type:

Clerks doing mail handler work	100
Mail handlers doing clerk work	6
Mail handlers moved from bid position to do other work	14
Mail handler could not work overtime because of work schedule	21
Union stewards not granted time to do union work	10
Disciplinary action disputed	8
Miscellaneous	<u>31</u>
	a/ <u>190</u>

a/Nine of the 181 grievances were classified in two categories.

The labor-management relations problems at the Salt Lake City Post Office are not going to be solved in a timely manner through the grievance-arbitration process. We believe that the following three actions could help resolve the continuing differences at Salt Lake City.

- The Service should permit Local 332 to conduct a review of craft assignments at the facility to document the inequities it claims exist.
- Local 332 should only pursue those craft assignment related grievances substantiated by its review.
- The Mountain Slopes District Office should pay close attention to local management's effort or lack thereof to improve relationships with craft employees.

A draft of this report was provided to Postal officials responsible for the activities discussed. An official of the Service's Labor Relations Department told us that the suggested actions which are under the Service's control have been or will be taken. He also stated that arrangements will be made to have (1) grievances relating to the interpretation of Regional Instruction 399 by-pass the normal lengthy grievance-arbitration process and be handled at the national level, and (2) grievances that are noninterpretive in nature handled expeditiously through the normal process.

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As agreed with your office, copies of this report are being provided to the Postmaster General, Mail Handlers Local 332, and others on request.

Sincerely yours,

W. J. Anderson

William J. Anderson
Director